The Quietest Ally

{This is a fanfic based on the epic fantasy | romantasy: Dragon Marked: The Legend of the Flame by Kara Knightlee*. The copyright of the characters and locations belongs to the author / publisher.}*

Setting: The training grounds, late at night. Aura is trying to master the silver-blue flame that now answers her call, with frustrating results.

The flame died in her palm for the fifth time, sputtering out like a drowned candlewick. Aura hissed a frustrated breath into the cold night air, her shoulders slumping. The glorious, easy power she'd wielded in the Shavreni with Vael was now elusive, slipping through her mental grasp like smoke.

"Forge with it, Caelanth." The Commander's voice echoed in her memory, but the command felt distant, impossible.

A soft scuff of a boot on stone sounded behind her.

Aura spun, her hands coming up, a weak flicker of silver-blue sparking defensively in her palms.

Teyne stood at the edge of the training ring, her posture as still and calm as ever. She didn't flinch at the display of unstable magic. She simply watched, her dark eyes reflecting the torchlight.

"You should be resting," Aura said, her voice coming out rougher than she intended. She let the flame die, embarrassed by its frailty.

"So should you," Teyne replied, her voice low and even. She walked forward, not with caution, but with a purposeful grace. She stopped a few feet away, her gaze dropping to Aura's hands. "It fights you."

Aura let out a bitter laugh. "That's one word for it. It's like trying to hold onto a live eel. In the Shavreni, it was... easy. It was part of me. Now it's just a weapon I don't know how to load."

"Perhaps you are trying to command it," Teyne said softly. "Instead of listening to it."

Aura looked up, surprised. Teyne was a warrior of few words, her wisdom usually shown in action, not philosophy.

"What is there to listen to? It's fire."

"Is it?" Teyne tilted her head. "Or is it memory? You told us it was. You said the Flame remembers."

Aura fell silent. She had said that.

Teyne took another step closer. "You are not the only one who has had to learn a new language of the body." She lifted her own left arm, the one that had been badly broken in their desperate flight from Mystwyck. It was healed, but Aura knew it still pained her, still felt foreign to the fierce fighter she was. "My arm remembers the break. It remembers weakness. I cannot command it to forget. I must listen to its new limits. I must learn its new strength. It is a partnership now. Not a command."

She looked from her arm to Aura's hands. "Perhaps your flame is the same. It is not a tool. It is a partner with a long, long memory. You must learn what it fears. What it loves."

The simple, profound truth of it settled over Aura, cooling her frustration like a balm. She had been trying to *force*. Teyne was telling her to *feel*.

"How do you know that?" Aura whispered, awe cutting through her self-pity.

A ghost of a smile touched Teyne's lips, a rare and fleeting thing. "I pay attention." Her gaze flickered to the golden Marks visible on Aura's shoulders, even in the dim light. "And I know what it is to carry a weight you did not ask for. To have your body become a story everyone else wants to read, while you are still learning the alphabet."

The empathy was so unexpected, so perfectly aimed, that it stole Aura's breath. Teyne saw her. Not the Dragon Marked, not the myth, but the overwhelmed young woman standing in the cold, trying to live up to a legend.

Aura looked down at her hands again. This time, she didn't try to summon. She just... remembered. The feel of Ashari's scales. The sound of Rewa's voice. The warmth of Kaelen's gaze. The trust in Teyne's quiet presence.

A single, perfect petal of silver-blue flame bloomed in her cupped palm. It didn't sputter. It didn't rage. It simply *was*. Calm. Certain. Beautiful.

She looked up at Teyne, her eyes wide.

Teyne gave a single, slow nod of approval. "There," she said softly. "You are not commanding the fire. You are remembering together."

She turned to leave, her message delivered, her presence a quiet anchor in the storm of Aura's destiny.

"Teyne," Aura called out.

The warrior paused, glancing back.

"Thank you."

Teyne's rare smile returned, a little warmer this time. "We are Flameguards, Aura. We do not fight alone."

And as she melted back into the shadows of Emberfall, Aura was left not with a weapon, but with a gift. The flame in her hand pulsed gently, a steady, silent heartbeat of light and memory. And for the first time all night, it felt like a part of her.